

Thought Leadership Foundations



A quick-start guide for B2B leaders

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Learn what turns ideas into action for discerning B2B buyers.

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Stay top-of-mind by being where your customers already are.

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Take the first step toward a high-conversion LinkedIn presence.

Own the conversation. Earn the sale.

Earning a reputation for excellence doesn't begin and end with leading your company. In the age of social media, you must also lead your industry—with insights that make your audience take notice.

B2B buyers are increasingly independent, doing online research to diagnose their problems, build strategies, and compare vendors. If buyers don't get the right information at the right time, you might not even be a contender.

In short, your brand needs content that crosses buyers' digital path and builds trust over time. That's where this guide comes in. Together we'll explore how you can position your company as a thought leader on the number-one B2B platform: LinkedIn.

01

Why thought leadership?

Learn what turns idea into action for discerning
B2B buyers.





83%

of the buying process happens before
a buyer engages a provider directly.

Gartner

As economic uncertainty tightens budgets and reconfigures priorities, your ideal customers need assurance that they're making the right decision. Your brand has to deliver value that spans far beyond your product or service, and act as a strategic partner in your customers' growth. But how do you do that when only 17% of the buying process directly includes you and your team?

We're coming into the era of the self-service buyer. They're researching independently, talking less to sales reps, and looking for education instead of persuasion. For B2B companies, that's where thought leadership comes in.

Successful thought-leadership content puts buyer needs first. It's supportive, engaging, easily digestible, and comprehensive. By making yourself the expert who removes obstacles, you become the trustworthy choice when it comes time to buy.

Centering the buyer

The buying process is made up of nine stages. You'll earn your customers' attention and trust by helping them progress through these stages with ease.



Problem

How can we identify or prevent the problem? How important is the problem? Why does the problem occur?



Strategy

What options do we have for solving the problem? Which approach is right for us? Whom do we need to involve?



Exploration

What do leaders have to say? What have other companies done? What are we missing?



Parameters

What's our budget? How soon do we need to act? What resources do we need? How will this work with our other systems?



Comparison

What are the advantages and disadvantages of different solutions? What do customers say? What kind of support will we get? How does the solution scale?



Consensus

What does the team think? Do we need to reevaluate? How do we appease everyone involved?



Validation

How can we be sure we have the best option? What should we consider during a trial or pilot?



Implementation

How do we get started? How do we build this into our workflows and systems? How do we socialize this solution across teams?



Optimization

What mistakes should we avoid? What skills will help us maximize our investment?

High-value thought leadership



Help them question their assumptions

To busy buyers, validating what they already know is a waste of time. Help them build confidence in their choice by challenging them, pointing out exceptions, and sharing fresh perspective.



Include third-party data

Buyers in the early stages of their process are wary of vendor-owned data that feels designed to sell them on your product. Validate your findings with trustworthy external sources.



Go beyond 101 topics

Dig deeper into topics, featuring subject-matter experts who understand the leaders and high-level business challenges your buyers are dealing with.



Put trends in context

Most buyers are interested in trends, but they also want insight into how trends may impact their business. Help them make sense of change as it happens.



Put a face to the brand

67% of buyers prefer content that comes from a person, rather than from a brand. Make it easy for them to connect to your personality and benefit from your experience.

02

Why LinkedIn?

Stay top-of-mind by being where your customers
already are.





4 out of 5

LinkedIn members drive
business decisions.

LinkedIn

There's a reason LinkedIn has its very own baked-in sales platform: LinkedIn is where decision makers go to learn and be seen. According to a recent study from Edelman, even when executives find their calendars booked back-to-back, they still find time to read thought-leadership content on LinkedIn for an hour or more each week.

Unlike your website or blog, LinkedIn intersects with your buyer's daily digital routine. There are approximately 720 million global decision makers on the platform in total, looking for up-to-the-minute insights from leaders like them.

Imagine having your morning coffee every day with decision makers from your top 10 dream accounts. Every day you give them advice—and they learn to like your way of doing things. When it's time to buy, your company will be the first on their list.

That's the power of a consistent presence on LinkedIn: value that builds relationships and nurtures prospects over time.

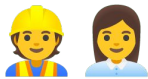
An audience for every goal

Even if finding new customers isn't your top priority, LinkedIn can help you take the next step forward.



01. Prospects

Connect with your ideal clients at every stage of the buying journey by helping them solve their most pressing challenges.



04. Top talent

Win the battle for top-tier employees by showing them your leadership style and work culture and addressing their primary job-hunting considerations.



02. Investors

Attract investors who believe in your vision, leadership, and product. Build confidence that your company is well-run and poised to grow.



03. Media

Tell the stories behind your brand and build a narrative that sparks the interest of the media—from local news and industry publications to popular podcasts.

Your shortcut to results

LinkedIn attracts B2B decision makers around the world, but using it to make an impact on your ideal audience is easier than you might imagine.

Creators are the top 1%

Although millions of leaders are on LinkedIn, only 1% of them are creating original content. When you position yourself as a thought leader, you have the advantage of being the first on a wide-open playing field. ([Kinsta](#))

6x more conversion

Audiences on LinkedIn consider it to be a trustworthy source. So when they see your brand and acquisition messages on LinkedIn, they're six times as likely to convert. ([LinkedIn](#))

InMail gets 4x more opens

Traditional email inboxes are overcrowded with a mix of work tasks and faceless marketing communications. By comparison, personalized InMail messages on LinkedIn get opened four times as often—so you can use them to increase your odds of connecting with the right people. ([LinkedIn](#))

03

Why my profile?

Find out how posting from your profile can level up
your impact.





Executive posts get 8–20x more engagement.

Qnary

Most companies will relegate their LinkedIn presence to a company page—and the truth is, they're missing out. The typical mix of HR, PR, and promotions leaves audiences thinking: So what? At a foundational level, these generic pages are misaligned with what people want.

People don't go on LinkedIn to follow brands—they join to connect with other people. So it shouldn't be a surprise that the majority of business decision makers prefer thought-leadership content that comes with a face they recognize. And in fact, that preference is mirrored in LinkedIn's own algorithm.

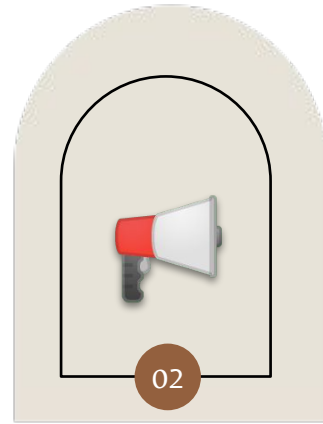
When done well, your executive presence on LinkedIn can extend your reach far beyond your network and shorten the path to one-on-one conversations with potential customers.

Why invest in people over pages?



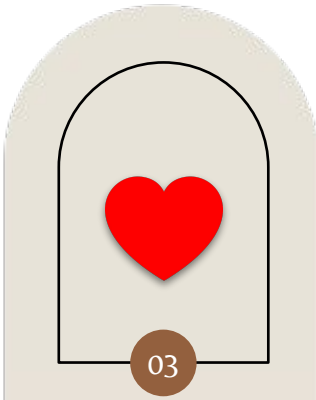
Exchange of clout

Your audience would much rather have industry conversations with you than with an anonymous brand profile.



10x the following

The average employee population can reach a much wider audience than their company page can.



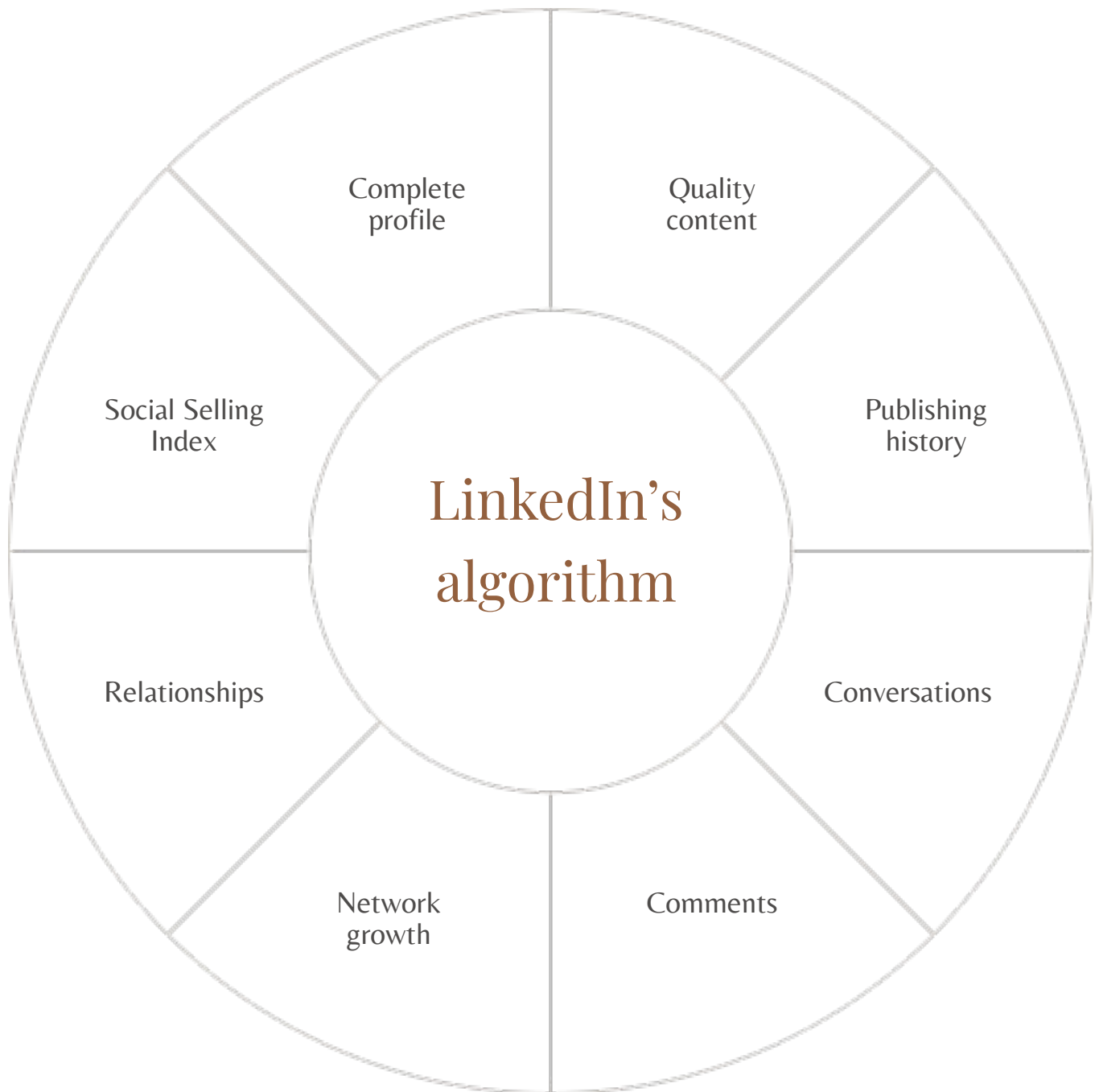
Personal storytelling

You'll become known, liked, and trusted faster, the more people get to know you on a personal level.



1:1 conversations

Instead of going through traditional marketing channels, prospects can gain direct access to an expert they already know.



Make LinkedIn's discovery engine work for you

There are rewards when you become a power user of LinkedIn. Just by having these foundational factors in place, you can boost your reach by 25%. You'll be seen by more people, more often—which means more opportunities to reach new prospects.

02

Audit your profile

Take the first step toward a high-conversion
LinkedIn presence.





Turn lurkers into leads with your LinkedIn profile

You probably already have hundreds of people looking at your profile each month—and if you start sharing thought-provoking content, that can quickly turn into thousands. Is your profile set up to handle the attention?

Your LinkedIn profile is a critical tool for generating leads. When people enjoy your posts or articles, they go to your profile to learn more. When you add new contacts or message your network, they check your profile to understand how you can help. Your profile is the foundation for all of your activities on LinkedIn.

That's why the first step to creating a valuable LinkedIn presence is updating your profile. On the next few pages, we'll explore your goals, identify some useful keywords, and figure out how to include a little bit of your personality. Then you'll get prompts for rewriting the key elements of your profile.

Once you're done, you'll be able to give your elevator pitch, build trust, and get your reader one step closer to becoming a customer. Your LinkedIn profile will be an always-on, organic funnel bringing new people into your orbit.

Let's get started!

DIY profile-audit checklist



01. Setting intentions

Clarify your personal and business goals so you can update your profile purposefully.



02. Owning your voice

Think about how you can emphasize parts of your personality to make an impact on your audience.



03. Uncovering keywords

Brainstorm the most relevant words to use in your profile to ensure you're easily found in search results.



04. Building conversion pathways

Give your audience something interesting or valuable in order to build a stronger relationship.



05. Refining your ideas

Use these insights to rewrite your profile and set up a cadence for ongoing updates.

Setting intentions

Clarify your personal and business goals so you can update your profile purposefully.

- 01 Why is relationship-building on LinkedIn important for your business? What problems can it solve?

- 02 What's working about your LinkedIn presence now? What isn't working?

- 03 What does your success look like on LinkedIn? Whom would you be connected to? What interactions would you have? How would that impact your reputation?

- 04 What is the most important first action that your new connections can take after visiting your profile or meeting you?

- 05 How do you plan to foster relationships with your new connections over time?

Owning your voice

Think about how you can emphasize parts of your personality to make an impact on your audience.

01 What are your favorite qualities about yourself?

02 What are your least favorite qualities about yourself?

03 How do you want to make your audience feel?

04 What do you want people to say about you when you're not in the room?

05 Which celebrity, influencer, leader, or other public figure shares a similar reputation to the one you want to earn?

Uncovering keywords

Brainstorm the most relevant words to use in your profile to ensure you're easily found in search results.

- 01 Who is your ideal audience? *Be specific about their industries, business size, titles, priorities, and mindset.*

- 02 What problems is your buyer trying to solve? *If different members of the buying team have unique problems, list as many as you can.*

- 03 What terms might someone use to find a product or service like yours?

- 04 If your offering solves your customer's problem, what outcomes can they expect?

- 05 What are the differentiators that make your offering an ideal choice?

Building conversion pathways

Give your audience something interesting or valuable in order to build a stronger relationship.

- 01 How do you want your business conversations to begin?
Directly with you? Through a salesperson? Through a form?

- 02 What is your most popular content with prospects?

- 03 What can your prospects get for free or at a low cost?
Demos? Trials? Consultations? Webinars? Resources?

- 04 How can people stay updated on you and/or your company?
Via newsletters, podcasts, or other alerts?

- 05 Where have you been featured in the media?

Refining your ideas

Use these insights to rewrite your profile and set up a cadence for ongoing updates.

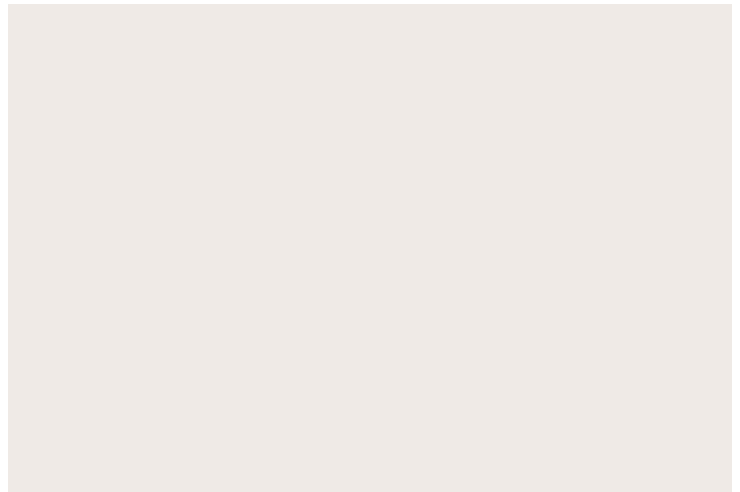
Your ideas

Your URL

A custom profile URL is a wonderful SEO tool. Personalize your URL by including your name, company name, and/or keywords for your product category. Use a dash between each word.

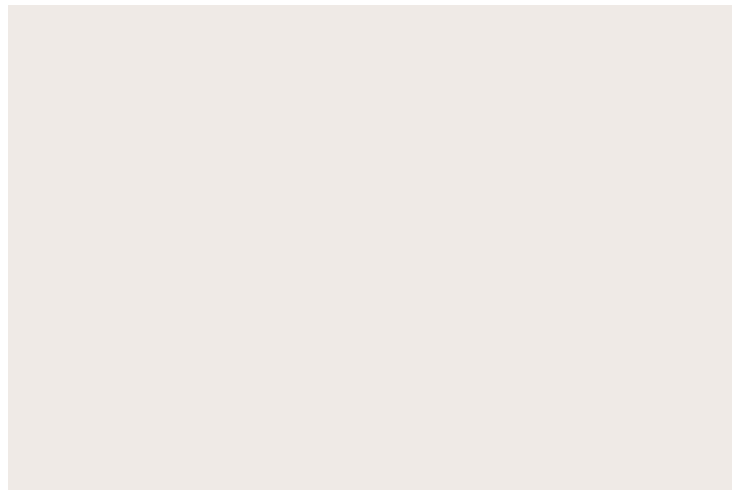
Example:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/company-category-ceo-jane-doe>



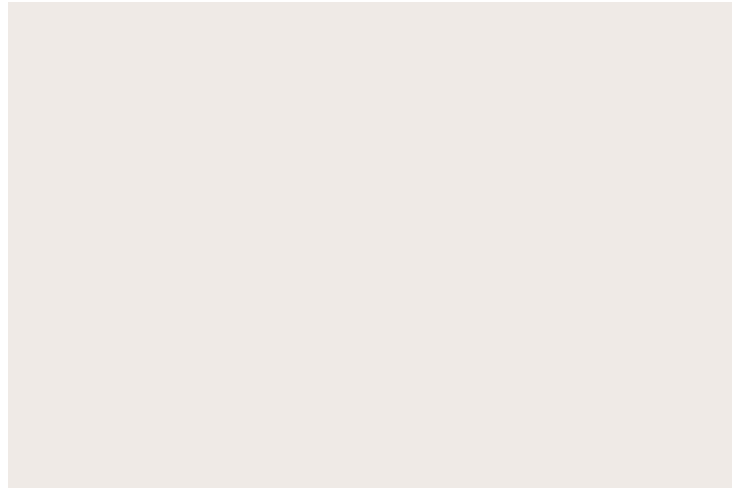
Your headshot

Use a professional-quality image, ideally 400 x 400 pixels. Consider an image that will visually cohere with your banner (which we'll talk about next). List the photographs that come to mind.



Your banner image

Create a 1584 x 396 pixel graphic with the help of a designer or free programs like Canva. Include your brand's colors, logo, tagline, and/or URL to help people understand what you do at a glance.



Explore customizable examples from [Canva](#)

Refining your ideas

Your ideas

Your headline

Your headline lets people know how you can help them. Experiment with versions that include your title, your company name, problems you can help solve, or outcomes customers can expect. (Max 120 characters.)

Example:

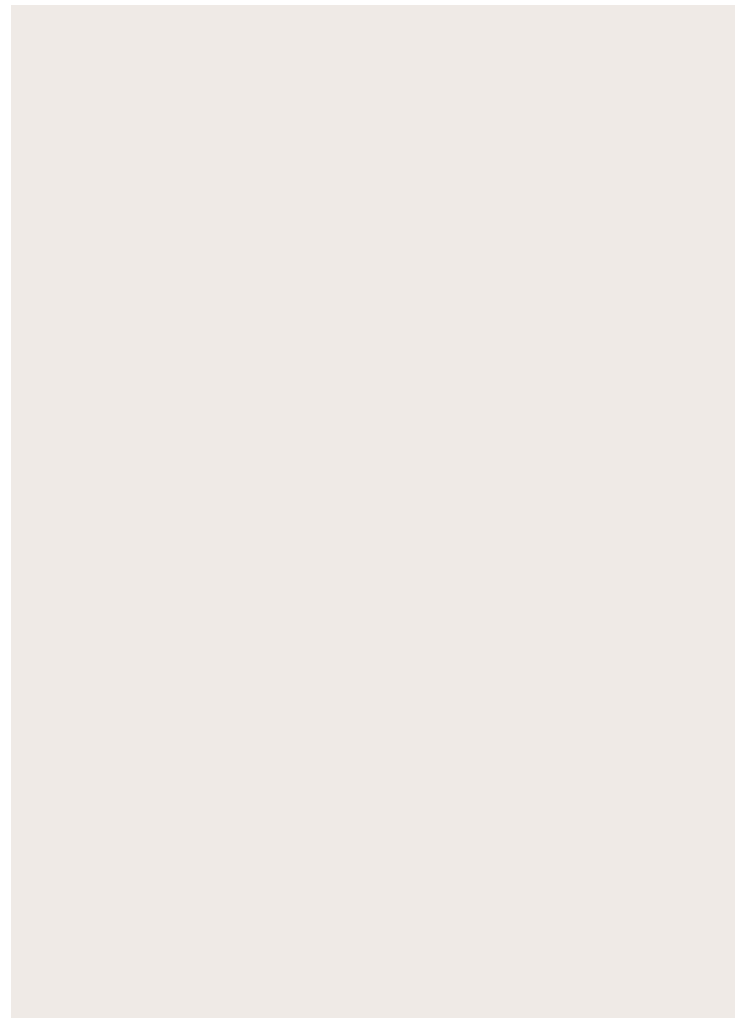
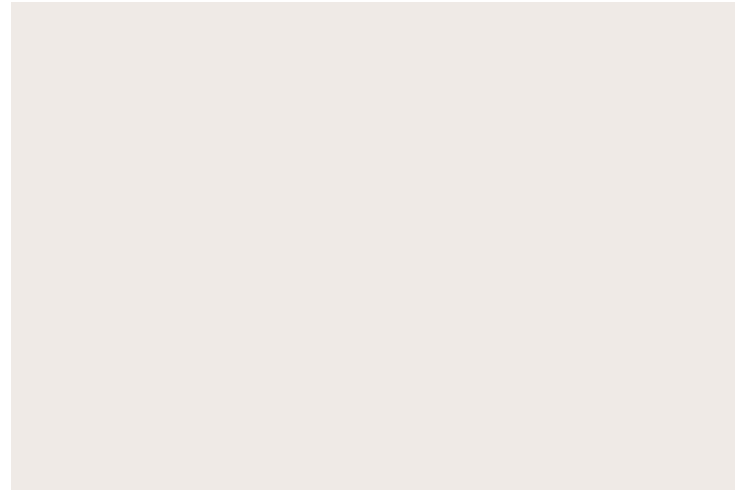
Turning B2B executives into thought leaders on LinkedIn |
Written-for-you LinkedIn content | LinkedIn profile
optimization | Social sales coaching

Your summary

With 2,000 characters at your disposal, this section is your chance to expand on what you do best.

- What is the future you help your customers create?
- Whom do you help, and how do you make that happen?
- What results have you achieved for past customers?
- How can visitors learn more?

This can also be a useful place to mention your personal experience, your areas of expertise, and any industry topics that are close to your heart.

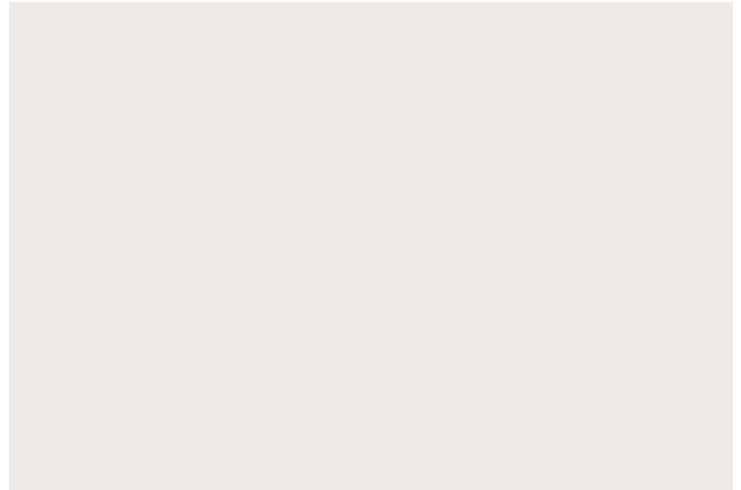


Refining your ideas

Your ideas

Your featured section

This is where you take engagement to the next level with your profile visitors. Link to free resources, your email newsletter, recent media, or your most popular content. List the pieces of content you'd like to feature, then create a short headline and description for each one.

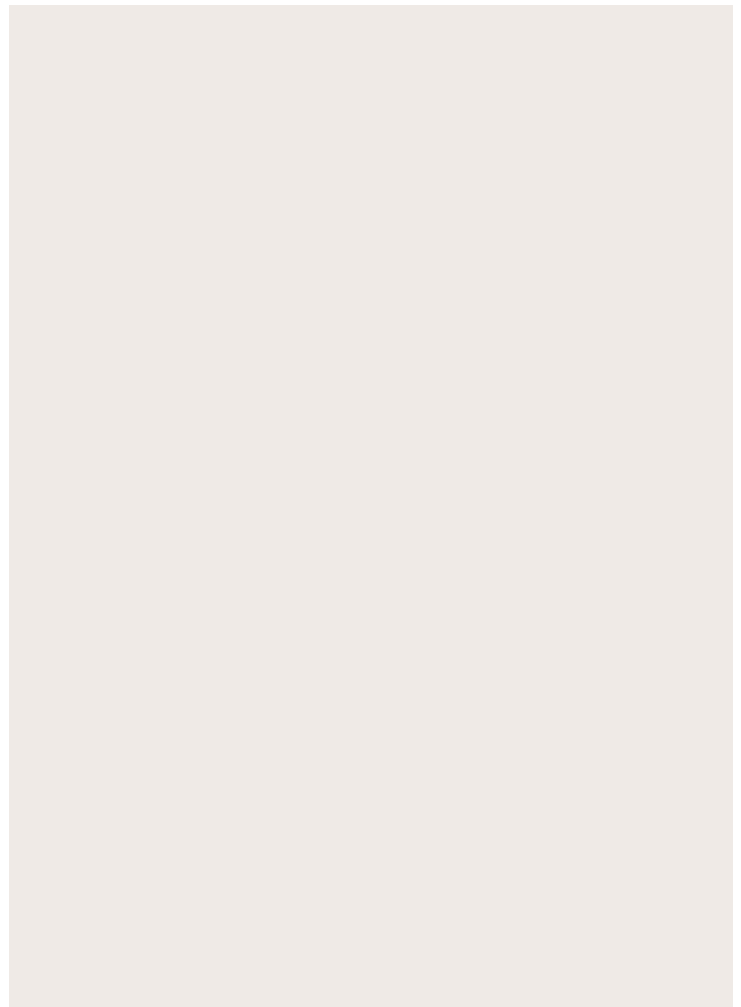


Your work experience

Use the entry for your current role to elaborate on the transformation customers can expect to experience in working with your company. Focus on the ways you help people, including any data points you can.

If you have public-facing case studies, include these as media under your current role, so visitors can see what's possible.

Although your prior experience can build trust, it's a good idea to keep entries simple: company names, titles, and dates only.



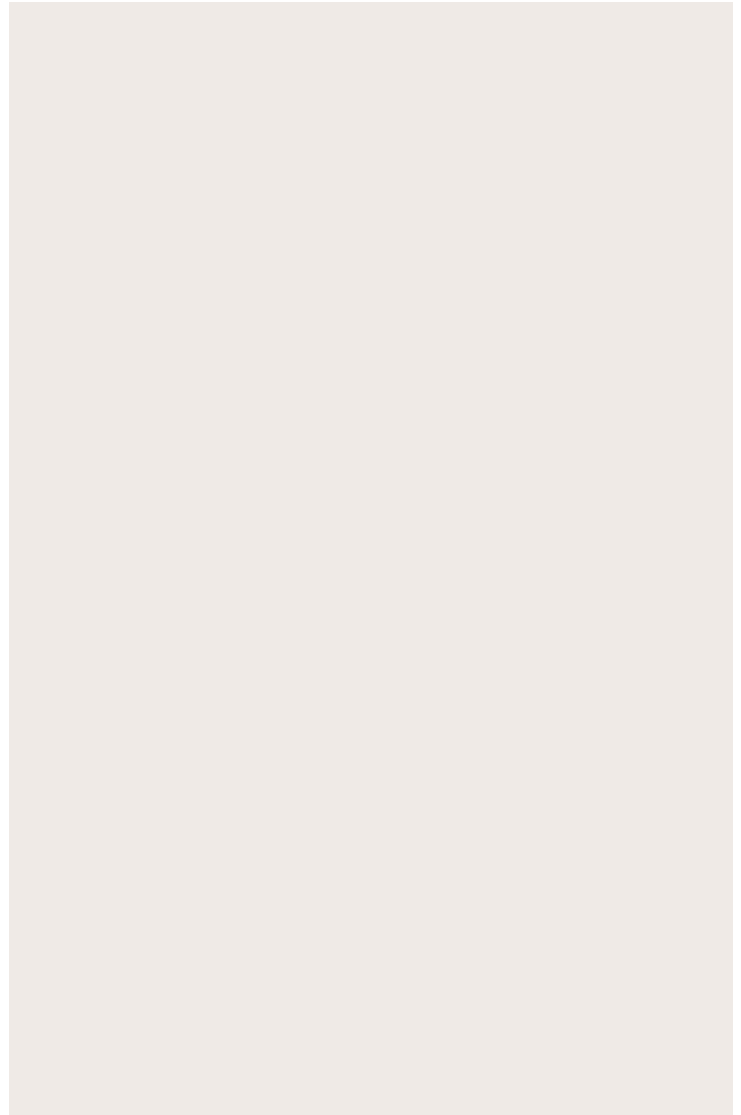
Refining your ideas

Your ideas

Your recommendations

Build confidence and clout in your network by asking for recommendations. If you already have some on your profile, you can choose which are displayed and which are private.

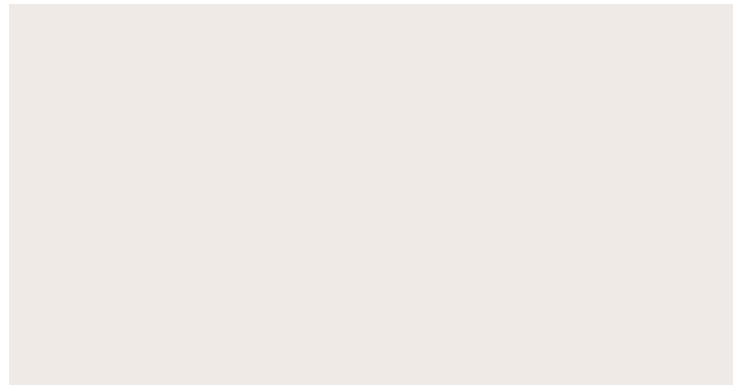
Make a list of any recommendations you'd like to remove from your public profile, then make a list of customers and connections you could ask for a referral.



Set a refresh reminder

Over time, you and your business will change. Your profile should too. Decide how often to revisit your profile (I recommend doing this at least twice per year), and write down the dates here.

Once you've finished updating your profile, put a note in your calendar to review your profile and make sure it still feels relevant.



02

What next?

Turn everything we've learned into industry-leading
thought leadership.



The path to thought leadership

01



Update your profile

Use your answers from the profile-audit exercise to give your profile a high-conversion makeover.

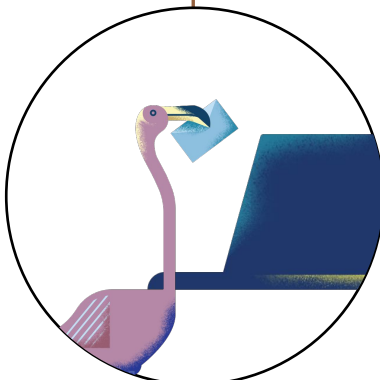
02



Make a content plan

Reflect on your areas of expertise and how you can create the most value for your ideal audience. Brainstorm a list of topics to write about in posts or articles.

03



Publish regularly

To grow your audience, consider posting two to five times per week on LinkedIn. This will help you stay top-of-mind in your network.

The path to thought leadership

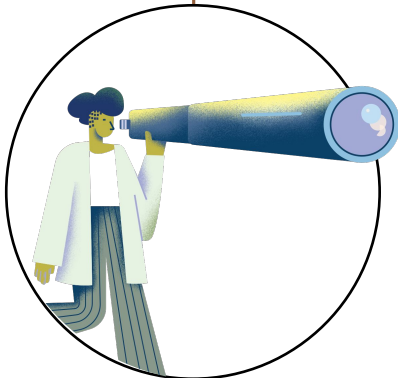
04



Add new contacts

Use smart search parameters to find relevant connections, then send personal messages to welcome them to your network. You can add up to 100 new contacts per week.

05



Look for industry conversations

Search hashtags for your topic, product category, or industry to see what other thought leaders are talking about.

06



Share in the comments

Don't stop at a thumbs-up. Tell a story, share a resource, or give your opinion in the comments to expand your reach into new networks.



Ashley Laabs

LinkedIn ghostwriter and coach

Composure Digital

I'm here to help!

To break through on LinkedIn, you need three things: heart, strategy, and good communication. Let's work together to help your brand strengthen all three.

Over the last 12 years, I've written for some of the most recognized brands in the world and built strategies for small businesses to earn attention with little or no budget. Now I help B2B companies use the full power of LinkedIn's discovery engine to earn more attention, trust, and sales.

If you're ready to build a stronger reputation among your clients, competitors, peers, and employees, let's talk about how LinkedIn can help.

Connect on LinkedIn

Book a 15-minute chat

Get the LinkedIn Mastery newsletter



Ashley delivers impeccable and thoughtful research, strategy, and creative work. She brings both depth of experience and fresh perspective—truly an impressive combination.

Miriam Bookey

Co-founder, Program 11

“

The secret of
getting ahead
is getting started.

Mark Twain